



Susan A. Boyd, staff photo, early 1970s. Photo courtesy Dumbarton Oaks Archives.

Susan A. Boyd

1938–2022

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It is with great sadness that Dumbarton Oaks reports the death on 5 May 2022 of Susan A. Boyd, curator emerita of the Byzantine collection. She died at the age of 84. Born on 13 February 1938 and known as Sue to her friends and colleagues, she was a native and lifelong resident of Washington, DC. She attended the Madeira School, a four-year college preparatory school for women in McLean, Virginia, where she graduated in 1956. She received a baccalaureate degree in art history from Smith College in 1960 and a master's degree in art history from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, in 1963, where her specialty was medieval art. Her master's thesis was on the Stavelot Triptych at the Morgan Library and Museum.¹ She also studied in Paris at the Sorbonne and the École du Louvre. Besides her professional interests in Byzantine art, art curation, and archaeology, Sue was also passionate about art history generally, classical music, opera and ballet, and traveling abroad.

In addition to being remembered for her forty-plus years of expert guidance of the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine collection and her scholarly accomplishments, Sue has been celebrated as a compassionate friend and colleague. She personally engaged with scholars who came to Dumbarton Oaks, often inviting them to her home for dinner parties or to outside cultural events. In the interviews of the Oral History

Project at Dumbarton Oaks, many remember that Sue helped to create a special atmosphere of being part of a group that was well taken care of. Cécile Morrisson remembered Sue as a good friend and one of the great assets of Dumbarton Oaks. Similarly, Chris Harrison reminisced about his good working relationship with Sue, calling her a "class act" and stating that her retirement "left a horrible vacuum." Susan Toby Evans thanked Dumbarton Oaks for enabling "yet another memorable friendship" with Sue. Their collegial friendship led to their making a tour of Egypt together. I also frequently socialized and traveled with Sue, enjoying and sharing her interests in European history and culture, classical music and dance, and fine wines and cuisine. Indeed, with the announcement of Sue's death on various social media platforms, many shared their sadness and offered fond memories of the times they had spent in Sue's company.

Sue enjoyed a long career working in the Byzantine collection at Dumbarton Oaks. She was first employed as assistant for the collections in 1962. She was promoted to assistant for the Byzantine collection in 1964, assistant curator in 1966, associate curator in 1975, and, finally, curator in 1979, a position she held until her retirement from Dumbarton Oaks in 2004, when she was named curator emerita of the Byzantine collection. Outside of Dumbarton Oaks, Sue was professionally involved with the Byzantine Studies Conference (later the Byzantine Studies Association of North America, BSANA). She was elected to the United States National

¹ Susan A. Boyd, "The Stavelot Triptych" (MA thesis, New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1963).

Committee for Byzantine Studies in 1982 and served as a member of the nominating committee. After retirement, she was elected twice to the governing board of BSANA (2005–2008).

Her accomplishments during her tenure at Dumbarton Oaks are many. She was instrumental in several reinstallations of the Byzantine collection, organized numerous special exhibitions, oversaw the acquisition and restoration of important art objects, participated in Dumbarton Oaks–sponsored archaeological projects, helped inaugurate a museum docent program, and served as editor of various Byzantine collection publications. She was an accomplished scholar in her own right and authored well-respected articles and catalogue entries, especially on early Christian liturgical silver plate and early Christian and Byzantine church decoration and wall paintings.

When Sue Boyd arrived at Dumbarton Oaks in November of 1962, the Byzantine collection had been uninstalled due to the construction of the nearby Pre-Columbian Gallery. Her early task was helping Assistant Curator Elizabeth Bland with the reinstallation of the Byzantine collection, which reopened to the public in December 1963. Two years later, she again assisted in the complete rethinking of the installation of that collection, this time due to the acquisition of new travertine display cases that were installed in 1965. In 1977, Sue received a National Museum Act Travel Grant to support her travel and research on Early Christian and Byzantine luxury minor arts in European museums and private collections. One of her largest responsibilities at Dumbarton Oaks involved coordinating the restoration of objects from the so-called Sion Treasure, acquired in 1963. This difficult work was undertaken at Harvard's Fogg Museum Conservation Laboratory between 1978 and 1985.² In 1982, Sue and her co-curators established

2 Susan A. Boyd, "The Sion Treasure: Status Report," in *Fifth Annual Byzantine Studies Conference: Abstracts of Papers* (Washington, DC, 1979), 6–8. See also Susan A. Boyd, "A 'Metropolitan' Treasure from a Church in the Provinces: An Introduction to the Study of the Sion Treasure," in *Ecclesiastical Silver Plate in Sixth-Century Byzantium: Papers of the Symposium Held May 16–18, 1986, at the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, and Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.*, Organized by Susan A. Boyd, Marlia Mundell Mango, and Gary Vikan, ed. Susan A. Boyd and Marlia Mundell Mango (Washington, DC, 1992), 5–38, and Susan A. Boyd, "A Bishop's Gift: Openwork Lamps from the Sion Treasure," in *Argenterie romaine et byzantine: Actes de la table ronde, Paris 11–13 octobre 1983*, ed. Noël Duval and François Baratte (Paris, 1988), 191–209.

a docent program at Dumbarton Oaks, and the first docent tours were led in March of that year. In 1986, she oversaw the installation of the first track-lighting system in the Byzantine Gallery. Perhaps her biggest project was her stewardship of the design and construction of the Byzantine Gallery Courtyard addition between 1987 and 1988 in collaboration with designer Stephen Saitas of New York, and the resulting reinstallation and reopening of the Byzantine collection, the latter occurring in November 1989.

Early in her career at Dumbarton Oaks, Sue Boyd became interested in assisting in archaeological fieldwork missions at Byzantine sites. In 1964, A. Douglas Tushingham, who at the time was associate director of the British-Canadian-French Joint Expedition to Jerusalem (Western Hill), invited Sue to briefly join the excavation in order to be trained in archaeological methodology. This led to her participation in several Dumbarton Oaks–sponsored fieldwork research projects. In 1969, she worked at two Cypriot Byzantine monuments: the monastery church of the Panagia Amasgou in Monagri and the monastery of St. John Chrysostomos at Koutsovendis. At both sites, she was tasked with making detailed descriptive notes of the cleaned and restored wall frescoes.³ The following year (1970) she was at the Byzantine site of Goren Kozjak of Bargala in Macedonia. In 1976, Sue spent five weeks in Kourion, Cyprus, to study and catalogue the marble and champlevé (enamel-inlaid) revetment fragments from an early Christian basilica, a study she would later publish.⁴

In 1979, the Byzantine collection began to sponsor special exhibitions, and Sue Boyd was instrumental

3 Susan Boyd, "The Church of the Panagia Amasgou, Monagri, Cyprus, and Its Wallpaintings," *DOP* 28 (1974): 276–349, and Cyril Mango with the collaboration of E. J. W. Hawkins and Susan Boyd, "The Monastery of St. Chrysostomos at Koutsovendis (Cyprus) and Its Wall Paintings: Part I, Description," *DOP* 44 (1990): 63–94.

4 Susan A. Boyd, "A Little-Known Technique of Architectural Sculpture: Champlevé Reliefs from Cyprus," in *JÖB* 32.5 (1982): 313–26; Susan Boyd, "The Decorative Program of the Champlevé Revetment from the Episcopal Basilica at Kourion in Cyprus," in *Actes du XI^e congrès international d'archéologie chrétienne: Lyon, Vienne, Grenoble, Genève, Aoste, 21–28 septembre 1986*, ed. Noël Duval (Rome, 1989), 1821–40; Susan A. Boyd, "Champlevé Production in Early Byzantine Cyprus," in *Medieval Cyprus: Studies in Art, Architecture, and History in Memory of Doula Mouriki*, ed. Nancy Patterson Ševčenko and Christopher Moss (Princeton, NJ, 1999), 49–70; and Susan A. Boyd, "A Note on Some Mythological Reliefs Carved in Champlevé," in *Mélanges Jean-Pierre Sodini* (Paris, 2005), 443–54.

in their conception, installation, and publication, often serving as exhibition curator or cocurator. The first exhibition was “The Chalice of the Abbot Suger” (1 May to 15 May 1979), cosponsored by the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, from which the chalice was borrowed. The exhibition was planned in connection with that year’s Byzantine symposium on Byzantine Orthodox liturgy. This was followed by “The Sion Silver Treasure: Conservation and Restoration” (25 October 1979 to 2 September 1980), which overlapped with “Gifts from the Byzantine Court” (6 February to 1 June 1980). The latter focused on two recently acquired evangelist portrait pages (BZ.1979.31.1–2) from a Byzantine lectionary that were exhibited with two additional evangelist portrait pages borrowed from the Cleveland Museum of Art. There followed, in quick succession, a string of special exhibitions initiated by Sue Boyd and the Byzantine Collection staff, especially Gary Vikan, who was a research fellow in Byzantine art (1975–1978), associate curator of the Byzantine collection (1979–1981), associate in Byzantine art studies (1981–1983), and senior associate for Byzantine art studies (1983–1985), as well as Stephen Zwirn, who was assistant for the Byzantine collection (1986–1988) and assistant curator of the Byzantine collection (1988–2012). The exhibitions were often organized in conjunction with outside specialists. These included:

- “Questions of Authenticity among the Arts of Byzantium” (7 January to 11 May 1981), a loan exhibition and exhibition catalogue in collaboration with Gary Vikan.⁵
- “Byzantine Pilgrimage Art” (5 May to 5 September 1982), a loan exhibition and exhibition catalogue (revised in 2010) in collaboration with Gary Vikan.
- “Masterpieces of Byzantine Icon Painting” (27 April to 26 June 1983), a loan exhibition with a related publication that focused on the recent Dumbarton Oaks acquisition of the Icon of St. Peter (BZ.1982.2) in collaboration with Kurt Weitzmann. For the first time, this exhibition had a press conference and press preview.
- “Lighting in Early Byzantium” (2 October 1984 to 6 January 1985), a loan exhibition with a related

⁵ Susan Boyd and Gary Vikan, *Questions of Authenticity among the Arts of Byzantium: Catalogue of an Exhibition Held at Dumbarton Oaks, January 7–May 11, 1981* (Washington, DC, 1981).

publication in collaboration with Maria G. Parani and Laskarina Bouras, the first Dumbarton Oaks Museum fellow.

- Four exhibitions specially organized for the 17th International Byzantine Congress, which met in Washington, DC, in August 1986. These included “The Craft of Ivory” (22 October 1985 to 26 January 1986), with a related publication in collaboration with Anthony Cutler, and “The Sion Silver Treasure” (1 April to 9 November 1986).
- “Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses” (23 September 1994 to 29 January 1995), a loan exhibition with a related publication in collaboration with John A. Cotsonis.
- “Byzantine Ceramics: Art and Science” (1 March to 11 June 1995), a loan exhibition.

During Sue’s tenure as curator, the Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine collection acquired several important objects. Sue was instrumental in these acquisitions, including their conservation, installation in the galleries, and publication. These acquisitions include a tenth-century ivory of the Archangel Gabriel (BZ.1972.21), a late tenth- to early eleventh-century manuscript (MS 4) of the Gospels of Luke and John (BZ.1974.1), a fourth-century openwork gold bracelet with jeweled clasp (BZ.1975.1), a late fourth-century hexagonal gold pendant set with a medallion of Constantine I (BZ.1975.6.1–2), three jeweled openwork gold necklace fragments (BZ.1975.7), an eleventh-century Evangelist Mark page from a lectionary commissioned by Empress Katherine Komnena (BZ.1979.31.1), a late thirteenth-century icon of St. Peter (BZ.1982.2), a late eleventh- to twelfth-century pair of gold and cloisonné enamel pendants (*kolti*) with sirens (BZ.1999.13.a–b), and an eleventh- to twelfth-century chain of seven gold and cloisonné enamel medallions (BZ.1999.14).

Sue Boyd recorded two published oral history interviews, one on her tenure as curator (<https://www.doaks.org/research/library-archives/dumbarton-oaks-archives/historical-records/oral-history-project/susan-a-boyd>) and another on her involvement with excavation and restoration projects in Istanbul and Cyprus (<https://www.doaks.org/research/library-archives/dumbarton-oaks-archives/historical-records/oral-history-project/susan-boyd-icfa>).

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